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THE
BELFAST MONTHLY MAGAZINE.

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COMMUNICATIONS, ORIGINAL AND SELECTED.

For the Belfast Monthly Magazine.

ON THE MIGRATION OF BIRDS.

THE migration of various species of birds, at particular seasons, has attracted the notice of the learned and curious in almost every age; that the ancients observed the same is evident from the words of the prophet Jeremiah, who says, "the stork, in the Heaven knoweth her appointed times, and the turtle, and the crane, and the swallow, observe the time of their coming." From these words of the prophet it is plain that several kinds of birds were observed to migrate in that country, although from the temperature of its climate they might be supposed to have had less need to change their habitation than those here. Respecting the appearance and disappearance of some birds here, all accounts hitherto published clash very much; indeed it is a subject very difficult to investigate, as the birds which visit us have different incentives, some coming as it were only to breed, and rear their young, while others seem by peculiar instinct, to come merely for food. I have endeavoured for several years past to gather something new on this head, by observing as minutely as possible their disappearance and coming; hoping to add some authentic information respecting their natural history, but as yet I have been rather unsuccessful, being only able to observe the time of their coming, &c. without finding myself justified in making any additional observations of consequence. As my attention was chiefly directed to the common birds, which visit us late in spring, or early in summer, I shall mention the earliest and latest times I saw or heard them during my observation;

BELFAST MAG. NO. XXIII.

also the remarks of several eminent persons who have written on this subject; and shall now begin with the cuckoo: concerning this bird, little has been said by the naturalist, and that little not satisfactory, some asserting that they migrate, and others that they do not, but creep into old hollow trees &c. lying in a torpid state the rest of the year: and that they are a species of hawk whose pipe is mellowed by sucking the eggs of other birds. Respecting its torpidity of ten months, I shall make no comment as it is so very unreasonable; the opinion of its being a species of hawk, seems founded on the shape of the bird, and their living by rapine, disappearing as soon as the other birds cease to lay eggs; this is generally a fact, but whether they are

"An annual guest in other lands,"

or not, I cannot determine. Of their manner of breeding, accounts are also contradictory, it is said, and commonly believed, that they build no nest, laying their egg in the nest of another bird, which adopts it as her own; this bird is said to be that which is usually known by the name of the moss-cheeper: Dr. Jenner says, they commonly lay their egg in the nest of the hedge sparrow. In the London monthly magazine for 1800, a correspondent says, "that he found that season a cuckoo's nest on the ground, with one egg, and on his examining it afterwards another egg, that he watched every day for upwards of a fortnight, and always found a cuckoo on the eggs. At length two young ones were produced with a dark lead-coloured down, which he saw the parents feed every day for more than a week, when both old and young disappeared, D d d

though the latter were not half fledged.* A few years ago I saw a young bird supposed to be a young cuckoo, it was near the size of a young magpie, and of a dirty gray colour, of an orange cast about the mouth, it eat greedily, of almost any thing, and lived several days; whether it was really a young cuckoo or not I cannot determine, but its chirp and appearance differed from all others I ever saw: the earliest I have seen any of these birds was April 25; latest, June 29. Concerning the swallows, accounts are still more contradictory; in Sweden, Denmark, and other northern countries they are said to remain under water during winter, but that is certainly not the case here; Mr. Pennant supposes they mostly remain in the country, under ground, and mentions that in a cliff near Whitby, Yorkshire, on digging out a fox, whole bushels of swallows were found in a torpid state. A person of veracity also informs me of a similar case in the county of Antrim. Though I believe both these accounts coming from such a respectable source, I do not conceive it to be general with them to lay themselves up like insects, &c. (perhaps they were both of a particular species) as many proofs are that they generally leave the country†; swifts and martins retiring early in autumn, and the common swallow about the latter end of September. On the evening of the 28th September, last year, I observed a great number of swallows flying backwards and forwards, screaming in an unusual manner, which I suppose was a signal to collect their body, as next day not one was to be seen; myriads of the swallow kind are often seen traversing the straits of Gibraltar, from north to south, and from south to north, according to the season, also various sorts of hawks and kites;

* As this is the only account I have seen of the cuckoos rearing their young, I would be glad if any of your correspondents could furnish any thing to elucidate the subject.

† Mr. Laskey, of Exeter, mentions seeing them setting off in vast numbers, steering a S.E. course.

they are said to keep as little as possible above the ocean, flying over the land: the following are the earliest and latest periods I observed them.

	First seen.	Last seen.
April 17,	Common swallow,	Sept. 28,
15,	White rumped martin	4,
23,	Land rail first heard,	Aug. 10,
25,	Cuckoo first heard,	June 29,
May 12,	Swift,	Sept. 2,

The land-rail, or corn-crake, is also said to migrate, which is somewhat more remarkable than of any of the former, it being a bird very unwilling to fly, and seemingly not well accommodated for long flights; they are said to retire to Spain, having been often caught lighting on ships in the channel and bay of Biscay; they commonly visit us about the beginning of May, the earliest I have heard them call was April 23, and latest August 10; I have however known them caught in fields about the roots of hedges several weeks after. I shall now conclude these remarks and extracts, hoping that some more successful observer will communicate his remarks on this subject. S.M.S.

C. Fergus.

For the Belfast Monthly Magazine.

A DIALOGUE ON TASTE.

Henry. MY dear Charles, how do you do? I have been seeking you. Where have you been?

Charles. I have just been paying a visit to Mrs. M. We had a most extraordinary dispute on the subject of taste, and we differed most completely.

Henry. How was that, Charles?

Charles. You know I have great pretensions to a taste in horses, and I was telling her that I had just given a very large sum of money for a very fine hunter.

Henry. And I suppose she condemned your extravagance.

Charles. She did, and laughed at what she called my folly.

Henry. I do not wonder at it.—How could a man of taste spend all his money on horses?

Charles. Why, Henry, I might as well ask you, how a man of taste could pay a thousand pounds, as you